

CHAPTER 4:

How Can You Achieve Interoperability?

Achieving interoperability is a challenging job. This is not a "one size fits all" problem and there is no single solution. There are short- and long-term strategies for solving interoperability—some involve improving coordination and cooperation, while other strategies require longer term planning and implementation of new systems, policies, and operating procedures. Understand what your first responders need. Planning needs to include policies and procedures, developing a governing structure, and identifying potential resources. Encourage realistic expectations, solutions take time.

Developing a plan for improving interoperability

A well-developed, coordinated plan is the cornerstone to any successful initiative and accomplishes the following:

- Defines the vision, goals, and objectives of what you are ultimately trying to accomplish.
- Describes the specific problems or needs that are to be addressed.
- Identifies any potential partners and their roles and staffing requirements.
- Proposes a detailed budget and timeline.
- Outlines a marketing strategy.
- Includes an operational plan that addresses how the project will be funded now and in the future.

Without adequate planning you will not know what you have, where

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you want to go, or what you need to get there. Mistakes will be made, time and money will be wasted, and the end result may not be what you intended.

Role of elected and appointed officials in the planning process

Elected and appointed officials are responsible for approving the annual public safety budget. In this role, they can help to eliminate barriers to interoperability by encouraging public safety agencies to engage in cooperative planning, investment, and operations.

Elected and appointed officials should consider asking their public safety agencies the following questions:

- What is the public safety vision of an interoperable radio communication system? What are the goals and objectives? What actions can elected and appointed officials take to help make interoperability a reality?
- Is there a well thought-out, coordinated plan to develop interoperable radio communication systems for public safety agencies within the jurisdiction? If not, why not? Has the elected or appointed official read or been briefed on the plan?

Planning principles

A plan is developed by examining existing conditions and needs, considering opportunities and alternatives, and adopting goals and objectives. Interoperability plans should comprise the following components—a communications system plan; a deployment plan; an operations, maintenance, and training plan; and a financial plan.

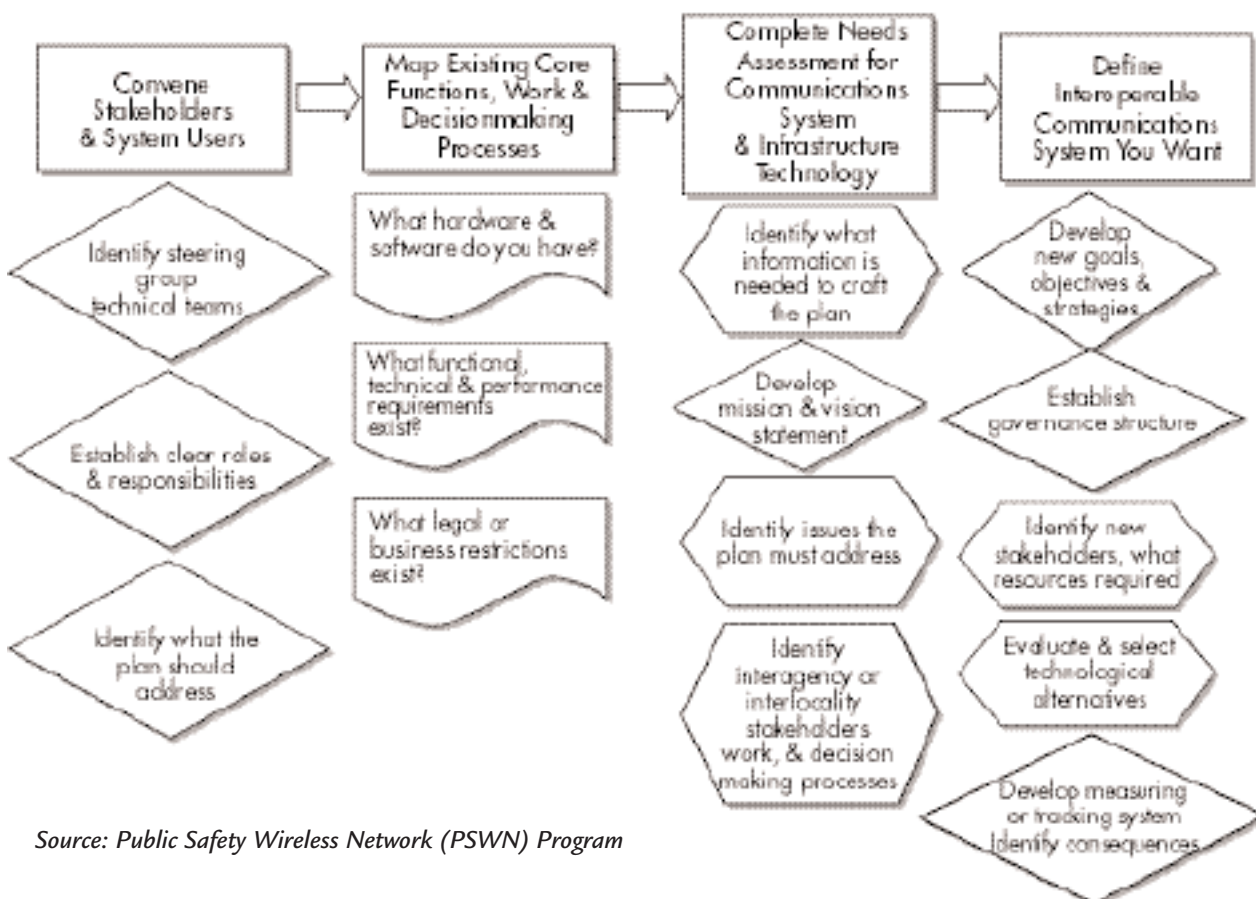
There are several principles to be considered when developing a plan for interoperability:

- It should be standards driven. It is easier for different jurisdictions or different departments to work together if they develop mutually agreed upon standards or values.
- It should be scalable. The solution should be able to accommodate

more than one range or level. For instance, it should be able to be used locally between agencies or localities, statewide, and at multi-state and national levels

- It should provide an ROI [Return on Investment]. The planners should be able to determine the return on the resources invested to the community, region, or State so constituents and agencies can understand what is gained in human and financial terms by developing interoperability.
- It should allow for incremental development. Most States, regions, and communities do not have the resources to develop full interoperability in one budget cycle. Develop a plan that can get the job done in smaller steps.

Interoperability Planning Process Flow Chart



Source: Public Safety Wireless Network (PSWN) Program

- It should ensure internal and external security. Any architecture developed to create interoperability should be able to maintain existing secured information and maintain the privacy level for data required by law.
- It should ensure there is interface with political approval processes and that it can accommodate normal budget cycles, legislative structures, agency roles, and decisionmaking cycles.